

What is your idea of an historical society? Do you think of it as a collection of dusty old manuscripts, of portraits of forgotten people dressed in obviously uncomfortable clothes, of rickety furniture with strings stretched across the chairs so that you cannot sit down? Or maybe you visualize a sewing circle of sorts, with a few elderly ladies rocking and stitching while they reminisce. You could think of it as a pretty building that constantly needs money to keep it painted, with a big garden that you have been asked to help weed. Or you might remember it as a pleasant place where you have met so many of your fellow townspeople, perhaps at a morning coffee or an evening lecture that entertained and instructed you. Maybe you have thought of it as a gateway leading to our past and what we were. Chances are you have never thought of an historical society as recording the present for the people of the future, and suddenly come to realize that someday you yourself will be history!

People like ourselves started our society here in Duxbury over 90 years ago with the expressed intention of "improving and ornamenting the streets of the town." It installed street lights, but only after the town had promised to maintain them. It planted trees, installed a stone watering trough down near the Bluefish River Bridge. Opposite the First Parish Church, the Old Town Hall, and the then Partridge Academy it bought land, still an untouched wooded area, so that no undignified or inappropriate structure might mar the dignity of the town center. Here is the modern theory of space conservation in action 90 years before the present generation thought it up. At about the same time it acquired land out in the woods around a pond so that Duxbury people could enjoy a leisurely carriage drive on a warm summer's afternoon.

After a while the sights were raised a little and the name changed to add the word "historical" to the title. Here we were, among the oldest settlements in the country, with more early background than any except Plymouth itself, and even Plymouth lost 18 of its original 23 Mayflower families to Duxbury within 10 years after the 1620 landing. It became our duty and our pleasure to collect everything we could about those early settlers.

The society grew active near the close of the 19th century, when our great shipbuilding days were beginning to fade from memory. Duxbury had launched more ships than any other town in America from 1790 until after 1840, and we had lost our lead only when the clippers came in, too deep to be launched in our shallow bay. Our leadership should be remembered, and who better to seize the initiative than our Rural & Historical Society?

Not much money was available in those years, but the spirit was there that has continued to this very day. The Society acquired a house by gift, the Drew House, where the Art Association now meets, and it began to collect Duxbury memorabilia. In 1966 the King Caesar House, cherished by 2 families after the departure of the Westons, was offered to the Society, touching off a surge of interest and a drive that succeeded in buying our handsome Federal style mansion, now become our headquarters and a museum which rivals any of its sort in the country for charm and authenticity.

With our purposes coming into focus, the Sarah Wingate Taylor Trust deeded to us her property on Clark's Island where the Pilgrims held their first religious service ashore in the new world. We enjoy a picnic there every summer and afterwards walk up to Election Rock where they worshipped on that chill December day of 1620.

Gershom Bradford, now in his 90s in Washington, with his brother gave the Society the Captain Gershom Bradford House on Tremont St., a typical sea captain's house built about the time of the King Caesar House, but maintained at the Bradford family's request as a lived-in house, not as a museum.

To support all this and more, the Society runs an active program year round. We open our houses in the summer and staff them with scores of Duxbury ladies. We present a lecture series and food sales, a chowder supper, the Clark's Island picnic, every so often a major project like a barn sale or an auction. We publish books related to Duxbury history: *The Settlement and Growth of Duxbury* last year; a revised *Roundabout Duxbury* this. A Duxbury cup plate of modern Sandwich glass depicts the brig ARGUS of Duxbury, built in a Duxbury shipyard. We offer Duxbury notepaper, postcards, maps.

Most of all the Society is people, all kinds of people, anyone interested in Duxbury, its past, its present, and its future. We are only the custodians of the present; but on our efforts depends the remembrance of the past and the acceptance of the future.